

Farmers' and Exchange Bank
141 East Bay Street
Charleston
Charleston County
South Carolina

HABS No. SC-268

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office, Design and Construction
143 South Third Street
Philadelphia 6, Pennsylvania

FARMERS' AND EXCHANGE BANK

Address: 141 East Bay Street, Charleston, Charleston County,
South Carolina

Present Owner
and Occupant: Captain Chester H. Taylor, 141 East Bay Street.

Present Use: Store and school of navigation.

Brief Statement
of Significance: A mid-nineteenth-century commercial building of
exceptional architectural interest.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

- A. Original and Subsequent Owners: Built and originally owned
by the bank [Beatrice St. Julien Ravenel, Architects of
Charleston (Carolina Art Association, Charleston: 1945), p. 223].
- B. Date of Erection: 1853-1854 [Ibid].
- C. Architect: Francis D. Lee [Ibid.].
- D. Builder, Suppliers: Lopez and Trumbo, contractors [Ibid.].

Prepared by Beatrice St. J. Ravenel
Architectural Historian
Charleston, S. C.
July 1958

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

- A. General Statement
 - 1. Architectural character: An exceptional example of
eclectic design by Francis D. Lee, incorporating many
Islamic elements and details, largely in its original
state.
 - 2. Condition of fabric: Generally sound as to structure
with some damage to exterior and interior finish.

B. Technical Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions: About 30' frontage by 100' depth; two-story; faces east
2. Foundations: One step only, on east front.
3. Wall construction: The facade is of brown sandstone laid in courses 11-1/4" high, with 1/8" joints. Courses alternate between slightly lighter and darker bands; the voussoirs of the arches alternate similarly. Sandstone continues about four feet around the corner on the south wall. Most of the south wall is of brick (9-1/4" x 4-1/2" x 2-3/4"), stuccoed and marked off to imitate stone jointing; this has been patched at various times and some portions are now bare.
4. Chimneys: Two chimneys are located on each side wall of the rear wing, about one-fourth of the distance in from the ends.
5. Street facade
 - a. Lower story: Three arched bays resting on a sandstone step terminate in slightly projecting corner piers. Arches are horseshoe-shaped, carried on square Corinthianesque piers with chamfered corners. The pier capitals are carved with acanthus leaves. Within each arch is a round window (above) and a doorway (below) with a lintel shaped like a round-shouldered arch. Doors are double, with the top of each leaf conforming to the shape of the opening; the main area of each is filled by an intricate curvilinear Mauresque grille (now painted black) with a hinged glazed panel behind, the grilled opening being framed by a carved egg-and-dart moulding. There is a small panel near the bottom of each door. A narrow string course with chevron carving separates the lower story from the upper; it terminates at the corner piers.
 - b. Upper story: Three arched bays are separated by flat piers. The arches have ten cusps, slightly exceeding a semicircle as to overall form. At the jambs are Corinthianesque piers with carved acanthus leaf capitals. The corner spandrels are paneled, the lines radiating from the center of the arch. Across the top of this arcade is a wide carved band with a conventionalized chain motive. The windows are glazed in four horizontal panels of three lights each, some of which are

hinged at the top. This may or may not reflect the original arrangement.

- c. Building cornice: Immediately above the band with the chain motive are two mouldings--a cavetto with an ovolo above--which extend across the entire facade to form a narrow capital for the corner piers. Above this is a plain frieze. The cornice consists (from bottom to top) of a small ovolo, two wide bands of rounded corbelled stalactites, a narrow fascia with widely spaced dentils, a cyma recta and an ovolo. Above the cornice is a low sandstone parapet, the central third being in the form of a slightly higher paneled block. This cornice and frieze extend around the corner along the south wall for about 12' and return against the wall.

6. South Facade

- a. Eastern wing. On the lower story there are three semicircular-arched windows, corresponding to the first, third and fifth bays on the interior. The structural arch is of brick, 4-1/2" thick. There is a simple wood casing inside the masonry opening; three large shutter pintles are attached to each side. Sills are of sandstone. Sash are in poor condition but retain thin muntins; they are double hung, nine lights over nine lights. The upper part of the wall is blank and has a simple coping.
- b. Western wing: The wall is recessed three or four feet from the plane of the eastern wing; its height is the same and the brickwork is the same (where visible under the stucco covering). There are three windows on the lower story and five on the upper one; sash are double hung, six lights over six lights. Each jamb has three shutter pintles. Sills are sandstone.

- 7. West facade: There is a projecting stairway wing at the north end of this elevation, with a window at the landing; the remainder has two bays of windows.
- 8. North wall: This wall is hidden by a contiguous building.
- 9. Roof: The roof is flat, covered with sheet metal. Slightly to the rear of center, over the eastern wing, is a wooden monitor window structure about 15' wide, 25' long, and 7' high. It is glazed on the north and south sides, admitting light to a skylight in the ceiling. The monitor has a low gabled roof.

C. Technical Description of Interior

1. Floor plans:

- a. First floor. A vestibule one bay in depth opens to the street; a three-bay by five-bay room occupies the remainder of the eastern wing in plan, and extends the entire height of the building. The western wing has a hall along the north side terminating in a stairway at the west end, with two rooms opening from it on the south side.
- b. Second floor. The western wing is occupied by a single room, three bays by five bays, with two fireplaces on the north wall. It has windows opening into the upper part of the east wing in the two end bays.

2. Stairway: This has a long flight to the landing, and a shorter flight returning, with an open well. The string is open; two turned balusters per tread support a round handrail.

3. Flooring: In the east wing the floor is covered with modern linoleum; pine floor boards about 5" wide were used throughout the west wing.

4. Interior finish and trim:

- a. General: The east wing is largely finished with ornamental plaster, using Islamic motifs. The west wing has plaster walls and ceilings with wood trim; details are "conventional" in style, in the Colonial and Classic Revival traditions.
- b. Vestibule in east wing. The floor is covered with square marble tiles laid diagonally, alternating black and white pieces. Walls and ceiling are plastered. Door trim is of wood, with a carved rope moulding around the architrave. The round windows opening to the exterior and to the interior are leaded in a rosette pattern with ten "petals."
- c. Main room in east wing:
 - (1) Lower portion. All four walls are treated with an arcade, three bays across the width and five bays in depth. These are actual openings at the east and west, and blank along the north and south walls (except for

the window openings on the south wall, described above). The pilasters are of wood up to the neck of their capitals; they are paneled on the face and have bases of the Roman type, but with a more prominent scotia and very small upper torus. Doorway openings have wood moulded trim following the round-shouldered arch head.

Pilaster capitals are of plaster; there is a central leaf-and-shell motif, and acanthus leaves at the corners. Above the capital proper is an impost block ornamented with a row of leaves. The arches are horseshoe-shaped.

The whole effect of the arcade recalls buildings in Toledo, Spain, such as the Church (or Synagogue) of Santa Maria la Blanca, although the details are not identical.

The three openings on the west wall have round grilled windows above the doorways. The grilles appear to be of wood, with a geometric development based on an eight-pointed star.

Above the arcade is a band which terminates the lower portion; it is fairly wide and projecting, with inverted "windblown" leaves in high relief.

- (2) Upper portion. This is entirely in plaster, and continues the same bay divisions as the lower portion of the room. The details appear to have been derived from Indian Islamic models. The paneled pilasters are short, the arches are cusped, and they terminate in a scroll at the spring line. From the center of each pilaster springs a bracket which is identical in form with half of an arch.
- (3) Ceiling. This consists of two parts--a main central area, and a wide border integrated with the brackets. The space between each pair of brackets contains a panel with clipped corners; at each corner of the room the space

contains four smaller panels and a pendant. The central area is somewhat higher than the rest, being defined by a "beam," on whose inner face is a band of leaves in relief, between mouldings; this, too, has the corners cut off at a 45° angle. The area is glazed to form a skylight--now painted over--made of square units. A pendant ornaments each intersection of the bars.

(4) Condition. In general the room is in good condition, but a little plaster has fallen from the ceiling, revealing the wood lath. Paint surfaces are peeling in a few places. The damaged portions are not conspicuous.

d. The second-floor room of the west wing. This has a large plaster cove cornice, a large plaster ornament in the center of the ceiling, and two simple marble mantels. The door and windows have architrave trim. There are panels below the exterior windows.

5. Hardware. Doors are hung on two cast-iron butts, typically.

D. Site: The east portion of the building extends entirely across the property and to the sidewalk line. There is a small garden area at the west (rear).

Prepared by Harley J. McKee, Architect
National Park Service
July 1962

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL: The following notes are excerpted from a letter dated August 10, 1962, from John D. Hoag, Art Librarian, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, to Harley J. McKee, Architect, National Park Service. They deal with the question of what sources of Islamic details may have been published before the date of this building:

"Your bank presents quite a problem. I believe the architect got most of his ideas from the former synagogue of Santa Maria de la Blanca in Toledo. There the spandrels of the horseshoe arches are occupied by tondi some of which have rectilinear interlace like the lattices in the oculi within the tympani of the arches at the end of the banking room. Even the capitals which as you say suggest romanesque or Byzantine rather than Islamic models are in general outline not unlike those at Toledo. Also in the Toledan structure a blind arcade of lobate arches could have suggested the similar arcade of the second story of the banking room. However, for this story the models were certainly Indian Islamic. In the palace pavilions of Shah Jehan at Delhi and

Agra the lobate arches spring from just such reverse spiral moldings as those of the bank. In Indian Islamic also the use of enormous brackets as in the bank is common.

"For precedent, ample Indian Islamic details could have been found in Thomas Daniel's series of engraving, Oriental Scenery, published in London from 1785 to 1808. I am certain that a copy of this series was in New Haven by at least 1845 where we also had a rather extensive Islamic revival using only Indian motifs by the Architect, Henry Austin (1804-1891). I know of no specific work illustrating the synagogue at Toledo prior to the 1860's but it is very probable that there is one.

". . .I shall try to find an illustration of Santa Maria la Blanca early enough to have been used by Lee."

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FIELD RECORDS

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